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Gender and Class Negotiations in an Edwardian Welfare Organisation: A Tale of Two Women.

Abstract:

This article considers the role played by two women in the establishment of a 'Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club, opened for boys in the East End of Sunderland in 1902. The parts played by the women enabled the male managers to resolve tensions relating to discourses of 'rescue' associated with a Barnardo model of social work, and the realities of the practical need of local boys for a place of recreation more appropriate to club work. The Club minutes illustrate the association between middle class female power and the caring aspects of child rescue enshrined within social work. Resistance of local families to rescue afforded a place for working class female intervention but only if it remained invisible and under the protection of the middle class female presence. The story of the two women explains how institutional masculine power was reasserted through a reconfiguration of practices and relationships.

Introduction

Between 1901 and 1904, two women became involved in the establishment of a new Boys' Club in the East End of Sunderland. The accounts of the contributions of Mrs Winter who was employed as the club caretaker and Mrs Scurfield who was associated through the Charity Organisation Society (COS), are woven into the minutes of the otherwise all-male weekly management committee meetings of the institution.[1] The widowed Mrs Winter lived above the club rooms in Lambton Street, while Mrs. Scurfield, married to Sunderland's Medical Officer of Health, lived in the new affluent area to the south of the town.[2] They were not the only women associated with the club but their interventions were unique insofar as they were regular and sustained, and from their different social positions, both occupied significant roles in the early life of the organisation.

The 'Sunderland Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club' was opened in January 1902. Its purposes, as its name suggests, incorporated both rescue and recreation, but there was a common understanding amongst the sponsors informed by the example of Barnardo. This can be discerned in the founding narrative which mirrors Barnardo's tale of his discovery of the homeless boy Jim Jarvis.[3] In Sunderland, the story is told of a kindly local architect, Frank Caws, who discovered a ragged boy asleep on the stairs of his office one winter's evening. Just as Barnardo founded his homes, it is claimed that Caws decided then and there to create a home and club for the poor boys of Sunderland's streets. [4]

Despite narrative similarities [5] the Sunderland boy, Thomas A.[6] was not the direct equivalent of Jim Jarvis. Thomas A. had a home, however overcrowded, and a family, however poor, in Sunderland's east end tenements, where income was derived mainly from unskilled, casual labour market associated with the shipyards and building trades. Families needed the extra few pence which could be earned by their children on the streets, mainly as newspaper sellers. Such children were highly visible and troubling in a generally prosperous and growing town, and the proposed institution addressed the problem at a practical level. Thus it was as a 'Street Vendors' Club' rather than a 'Waifs' Rescue Agency' that the organisation was to become a popular facility. However, it was the discourse of 'rescue', and of 'child-saving'[7] associated with Barnardo which provided legitimation for the intervention. This discourse imagined boys as 'orphans' who could find a 'home' in the club. As one sponsor indicated at the opening ceremony, "they would like to provide the lads with a comfortable home, to which they could come and be clothed and fed, and taught a good trade - to act as a sort of god-father towards them."[8]

This gave Mrs. Winter a role within the club. It was but a short step from caretaker to that of fulfilling traditional maternal responsibilities towards the boys when the ‘godfathers’ were not present.

The Barnardo narrative encouraged a deficit view of local families. If East End children were not *actually* the orphaned homeless, nevertheless, their street life suggested a want of proper family care, control and training. This supplied the moral grounds for private as well as public interventions which again, was given shape at the opening event:

“Coun. Summerbell said a great deal had been said about clubs of that kind taking upon themselves the feeding and clothing of the children of those people who had spent their money in drink, but they would be doing a grand work if even they succeeded in tracing the drunken parents who neglected and ill treated their children, and got them brought before the magistrates. It was their duty however, if they desired to uplift the community morally and socially, to at least rescue the lads from drifting into a life of vice and crime.”[9]

If sentimental Barnardo imagery could be applied to the innocent children of the streets, this did not imply that negligent parents could be treated with similar sympathy. Concern for cruelty to children, influenced by the recently formed NSPCC [10] can be discerned in the intention to police families. This opened the door to a working partnership with the Charity Organisation Society and it was through this door that Mrs. Scurfield walked.

Adherence to the principles of scientific charity advocated by the COS were a necessary sign of respectability for any welfare organisation in this period[11] and in his opening speech, the chairman, Mr Thompson [12], was careful to reassure the public that:

“One of the dangers they would have to watch carefully would be that of improperly relieving parents of their responsibility to their children. The committee, however, meant to be cautious in dealing with the problem that lay before them, but they hoped to be able to bring a little sunshine into the lives of the street vendors.”[13]

Mrs. Scurfield, as a representative of the COS, took responsibility for home visits from which she would provide the information necessary for making informed decisions about club members. In doing so, she enabled the male sponsors to resolve the tension between the idea of the ‘orphaned waif’ and the reality of the family by relieving the men of the necessity of making direct contact with the families. Middle class women such as Mrs. Scurfield had already established their place in this field of voluntary public work by the end of the nineteenth century [14] and as such it would not have been unusual to incorporate women in this capacity.

Thus the two women occupied positions in the organisation of the Waifs’ Rescue Agency and Street Vendors’ Club which were particularly associated with the feminine world of caring, families and homes. Their participation was facilitated by the discourse of ‘rescue’, which was initially dominant in providing the rationale for the venture. However, the real relations which emerged as the institution adapted to its circumstances were to challenge the grounds for their accommodation.

The possibility of resistance is not anticipated in the discourse of ‘rescue’ but the minutes suggest that whilst the club facilities were attractive, ‘rescue’ was not and local families refused the designation of their children as ‘waifs’. However, there was no discourse of club work to match the public relations power of the Barnardo model of rescue. The Sunderland Club was not sponsored by any religious body or a settlement, and unlike most other boys’ and girls clubs, it thus lacked a predetermined philosophical or methodological framework or a defined group of sponsors. It needed to appeal to the widest cross section of Sunderland wealth to attract support. Russell and Rigby had yet to publish their influential text ‘Clubs for Working Boys’ [15] and ‘youth work’ as a category of welfare intervention was not a meaningful term. Public accountability was therefore maintained through the romantic discourse of rescue, long after this ceased to signify practice in the Lambton Street Club. Not until 1936, when it affiliated with the National Association of Boys’ Clubs, did the name change to Lambton Street Boys’ Fellowship Centre, and as late as 1935 the Barnardo-influenced ‘before’ and ‘after’ photographs of Thomas A., as a ragged child and later as a respectable, skilled man were being used to demonstrate the organisation’s success [16]

The presence of Mrs. Winter and Mrs. Scurfield eased the tensions between the terms in which the work of the club was supported and the realities as they emerged in practice. The women’s work enabled the male sponsors to reconcile competing motives of benevolent paternalism and moralising authoritarianism. They also helped to mediate the various and conflicting interests of managers and members. Mrs. Winter facilitated positive relationships with local boys and their families, whilst Mrs. Scurfield ensured the

respectability of the venture amongst the affluent middle classes whose donations and moral support could ensure its survival. Ultimately, the women also shouldered the burden of failures associated with 'waifs rescue' and 'social work', enabling the men to adjust more easily to the development of Boys' Club work as a prototype of youth work practice.

Mrs Winter and Mrs Scurfield acted as women in particular social locations, and it was in terms of their structural identities that they were positioned in the foundation of an organisation which has survived for more than a century. A detailed reading of the club records provides an insight into the complexity of power relations within one organisation at a particular moment in place and time. This contributes to a more general appreciation of the manifestations of institutional inequalities which continue to resonate in contemporary welfare organisations. Specifically, the stories of these two women illuminate inequalities within British philanthropy at the start of the twentieth century and capture a moment in the process of differentiation and specialisation within social work. In this process, developmental work with young people became separated from generic, family-focused social work, and this separation occurred along fault lines of gender and class. As the twentieth century progressed, social work became increasingly identified with women of the professional middle classes concerned with female competence in the family, whilst work with young people became a semi-professional service dominated by a workforce of respectable working class men concerned primarily with the problem of adolescent boys in the public arena. The dynamics of power involved in the creation of this division can begin to be discerned in the stories of these two women.

Mrs Winter

When the Lambton Street club opened in January 1902, Elizabeth Winter was already living on the premises with her two children and a lodger. The building had recently been occupied by four families but now hers was the only household remaining. With the opening of the club imminent, it was decided “Mr. Caws to instruct Mrs Winter to remove her furniture into the Back Room on first floor and repair to room on Top Floor till further arrangements can be made”(23rd Dec. 1901). Meanwhile, “The question of what terms to offer Mrs. Winter or whether to offer her the position of temporary Caretaker was discussed and deferred.” This suggests that the other residents had moved after being offered 'terms', but that Mrs. Winter was not keen to leave her home. Whatever the circumstances, in the management meeting following the formal opening, it was agreed that she should be employed as caretaker on three months trial “subject to interim alteration by the Committee if found necessary to open night shelter meanwhile.” The terms included wages of five shillings from which she was to buy her own soap, cloths and utensils, two rooms rent free, free coals and gas. She was also allowed to “retain her respectable man lodger” (2nd Jan. 1902).

She was the first, and so far, the club's only employee, but there was no suggestion that she should be involved in the work with the boys. The philanthropic ideal of voluntarism implied that face to face work with the boys would be undertaken by club managers and supporters. As tenant and employee, Mrs. Winter was clearly situated outside the class of those who could entertain the possibilities of voluntary service. Perhaps there was benevolence in the decision to allow her to stay although conveniently this also answered the practical need for a caretaker.

The debate which was soon to emerge around the engagement of a male worker implies that some members of the committee might always have preferred a resident male caretaker. Children needing care implicitly also needed training and discipline to set them on the road to respectable adulthood and in the case of boys, controlled masculinity was central to this. Just one week after the opening, probably after encountering boisterous behaviour, it was suggested that a male worker be employed as a “custodian” for two hours per night. This occasioned some unease. The proposal was accepted in principle, but “several members dissented”, probably because the implied authoritarian strain jarred against the vision of homeliness and refuge from the streets. Homeliness could be provided very simply by Mrs Winter as a paid *caretaker*. However her presence did not answer the question of order and the idea of a male employee was pursued.

The possibility of employing a female custodian simply did not arise. Mrs Winter was initially asked about the suitability of her lodger for the post. The problem could perhaps have been most satisfactorily resolved if it could have been kept in-house. But her response to these enquiries “was not entirely satisfactory” (16th Jan. 1902). Given the usual power relations between housekeeper and lodger, it was highly unlikely that she would have welcomed the prospect of these being disturbed by his employment in the club as either an equal or a superior in status! Meanwhile any male worker would surely have represented a threat to her overall position as the person ‘on site’ and effectively in charge of day to day activity.

Questions of discipline and order eventually became urgent in the minds of some committee members. It was suggested that “an ex P.C.” might be appropriate for the work

(16th Jan. 1902) and after advertising, the post was offered to a Mr. McLeod, whom it seems was associated with the police.[17] McLeod's contract was to last, like Mrs. Winter's, until the end of March 1902.

With McLeod in place during the week, voluntary work became supplementary rather than central, although individual managers continued to undertake informal responsibilities, such as meeting boys to take them to prospective employers. In addition, Frank Caws was now able to open the club on Sundays for an ecumenical Christian meeting. Mrs Winter and her 17 year old daughter both attended these "Pleasant Sunday evenings" (20th March 1902), signifying her personal commitment to the work of the club, and incidentally her loyalty to Caws. McLeod on the other hand was absent.

Indeed, there is no mention of McLeod in the minutes until one Committee member reported that the man was not popular with the boys (13th March 1902) whereupon others related that members of the Ladies' Committee, including Mrs. Scurfield, had privately communicated similar information. Probably the following story, recounted by Caws to the Sunderland Watch Committee during a discussion about playgrounds refers to McLeod and the cause of his unpopularity:

"They had good reasons as to why the boys didn't make use of the playgrounds. Policemen were put there to keep order. They had had a little experience of that in Lambton Street. They had a policeman in plain clothes when they opened the place to keep order. In a sense, the policeman stood like a pillar. There were open spaces all around.

(Laughter.) These spaces widened and widened, until it was all space and

no boy. (*Renewed laughter.*) The time came when they disengaged the policeman. No sooner had he gone than the boys began to troop back in again.” [18]

In the face of the difficulties, it was decided not to renew McLeod’s contract at the end of March 1902. Simultaneously, we find the first intimation that Mrs. Winter was becoming more than a 'caretaker' when she reported that she had sent home two boys who had measles in their family. Already she was adopting the responsibilities envisioned as belonging to the custodian (20th March 1902).

The willingness of the management committee to allow Mrs Winter to take charge of everyday practicalities gave her personal status and credibility as a representative of the organisation. As a local resident, she knew the neighbourhood. Thus she could learn very quickly for instance, if there were infectious disease in a family, and though her position in the new club might be a humble one, she felt able to exercise some authority on its behalf. In the measles case, in confirming her decision and in asking her to ensure that the children did not return for an appropriate period, the committee implicitly began to formalise the authority which she assumed at the very moment when her contract was due to end.

There was no minuted discussion about whether or not Mrs. Winter's contract should be extended. Instead, she appears to have simply been allowed to take McLeod's place. Afterwards, on a motion put forward by Caws, it was agreed to pay her an extra two shillings and six pence per week for as long as she was “asked to superintend the boys”

(10th April 1902). For half the price of a man, the committee could employ a woman who was clearly able to undertake the practical work required much more successfully than the previous incumbent. Mrs. Winter moved from being simply a caretaker, to caretaker and superintendent, the title of “custodian” meanwhile having been abandoned. The job she was doing, involving as it did her personal location, the interpersonal relationships of neighbourhood and her maternal approach, was proving to be an important element in the ability of the club to win the loyalty and support of local boys. She was the vehicle through which personal and private information could be translated into public action. Yet despite the formal practical acceptance of her club duties, the basis of her influence, lying within the informal and the private realms, was fundamentally insecure. She could not afford to relax.

Almost immediately she had undertaken superintendent duties, the question of order was raised:

“Messrs. Kirby and Brewer reported an act of insubordination by one of the Club Boys in consequence of which they had temporarily expelled him last Friday evening. They argued that a male attendant was necessary in place of Mr McLeod to preserve order” (17th April 1902).

Why the “act of insubordination” should be translated in gender terms, why it should have necessitated a male worker and by implication be held against Mrs. Winter, is not explained by the two offended committee members, but luckily for her:

“Mr. Cameron, Mr. Summerbell and others thought in prospect of the Summer months it would not be wise to make such an appointment

especially as the case reported was the only case of disorder yet complained of since Mr McLeod left. It was decided to do nothing in this matter at present” (17th April 1902).

Again, practical considerations triumphed and for the summer of 1902, Mrs. Winter's position seemed secure; the matter of order was not raised again. The silence implies her success. By May, it was reported that the boys were beginning to deposit their savings with her and the Committee formalised this private arrangement by appointing one of its members as Savings Bank Secretary (22nd May 1902), thus creating a public scheme for which the Committee took final responsibility, and incidentally, removing it from working class, female control. In September, so pleased were the managers with what had been accomplished, that when Caws proposed that Mrs Winter's wage be increased by two shillings and sixpence, the equivalent of that which had been paid to McLeod, there was not a murmur of dissent (18th Sept. 1902). Mrs. Winter must have begun to feel that she was an important employee. Yet in reality her status was anything but secure. During that summer, the minutes record for the first time the presence of the man who was ultimately to replace her: “The insufficiency of space for the Drill Class conducted by Mr Smith was reported, and it was resolved that the question of improved space shall claim priority of other business at next Committee Meeting” (28th Aug. 1902).

Notably, Smith had begun working with the boys in organised groups, pursuing an activities-based agenda which was both attractive to the boys and matched well the ideas of discipline, order and manliness which were central features of the emergent, recreational, Boys’ Club movement. [19]

In the meantime, Mrs Winter focused upon personal and caring tasks. For example, in October 1902, she escorted William F., a disabled boy, to Newcastle, to meet an agent who would take him to Barnardo's home in Stepney. On the recommendation of the club, William's parents had given permission for him to leave Sunderland in anticipation of his being trained as a tailor (9th Oct. 1902). Later, when William wrote to the club to report on his progress and asking if he might come home for Christmas, (a request refused), it was to Mrs. Winter that he addressed his letter (30th Oct. 1902).[20]

This was but the first of a number of situations recorded in which decisions relating to the welfare of individual boys were effected through Mrs. Winter. When boys were found work outside of the district, it was she who escorted them either directly to the place of work or to the railway station (eg. 23rd. Oct. 1902) and it was she who received the reports of their safe arrival (or otherwise). When boys needed to be clothed decently in order to start a new job, it was usually Mrs. Winter who fitted them out (eg. 14th Aug. 1902). When two boys left their jobs, "Mrs Winter was called in and narrated to the committee some particulars of these cases" (30th Oct. 1902). The managers could discover details about the boys through Mrs. Winter which would otherwise have been unavailable to them. When two boys who had tramped to Sunderland from Scotland turned up on the Lambton Street doorstep, it was Mrs. Winter who took them in and who was requested by the committee to give them board and lodging until such time as they could be sent to employment. In the case of another who arrived from Glasgow, Mrs. Winter simply took it upon herself to send him immediately, along with a local boy, to employment in the glass works in Seaham, six miles down the coast. The committee did

not demur (23rd Oct. 1902). The role Mrs. Winter adopted aided the relationship building which was a necessary aspect of establishing the credibility of the club as a 'caring' institution in the neighbourhood.

A practical working pattern was being created which suited all parties and which most importantly, was reflected in the popularity of club membership. Acknowledgement of Mrs. Winter's contribution was publicly offered in the first annual general meeting of February 1903:

“Ald. G. B. Hunter JP [21] then moved
'that the Retiring Ctee. & Officers to be thanked for their Services' He
mentioned these in detail & also remarked on the excellent service of
Mrs Winter (the caretaker) who had been like a mother to the Boys.
Mr Herbert Corder seconded.” [22]

Although her formal title remained that of Caretaker, Mrs Winter established herself in practice as the first resident superintendent and youth worker of the Lambton Street Club. Nevertheless, her inability to gain the title of 'superintendent', and its displacement with the notion of mothering, despite the *de facto* acceptance of her duties, was not insignificant.

In early 1903 Mrs. Winter's position seemed relatively secure. However, there had already been one note of concern about her work which related to her giving too much leeway to the boys especially in the matter of payment for club services. So for instance, having obtained the permission of the committee to provide the boys with cocoa at ½d per

cup (4th Dec. 1902), and coffee and biscuits (11th Dec. 1902) she was later rebuked for not charging some of them. Her action provoked

“a heated discussion...about the immorality of the indiscriminate giving of Refreshments to the boys attending the Club. The C'tee wished it to be distinctly understood that before cocoa to be provided gratis for a number of the boys connected with the club (on the premises) the matter should be brought before them” (22nd Jan. 1903).

The following week, “Mrs Winter was instructed that no refreshments be provided gratis for the boys in large numbers” (29th Jan. 1903). Similarly, maybe because of her sympathy for the circumstances of the boys, she seems to have allowed many of them to attend the club despite their failure to pay their 1d per month membership dues. When she was instructed to tighten up on this, as with the matter of the refreshments, she complied without question (2nd April 1903). Mrs. Winter was scrupulous in attempting to carry out the policies and decisions of the managers. However she was unclear about the invisible boundaries created by their philosophy of welfare.

Mrs Winter was probably emboldened in her interventions by the pragmatic approach of Frank Caws, and the everyday working relationship which she created with him. She seems to have understood the significance of his personal power as Club founder and Hon. Secretary, and actively maintained her alliance with him. However, she was shielded from a direct encounter with the real power relations operating at committee level by the charisma and influence of Caws on the one hand, and her own exclusion from formal decision-making processes on the other. Clearly she was not fully informed about

the principles or the underlying tensions guiding the decisions of the Committee. It was inevitable that, as she began to feel more secure, she would be more likely to take independent decisions over what must have seem fairly small matters which simply extended the personal, caring role which the committee seemed to endorse, and in so doing, to transgress.

The recorded transgressions were probably not in themselves of sufficient importance to undermine Mrs. Winter. What was of more significance, and what she could hardly have seen from her own perspective, was that in interpersonal terms the power of Mrs. Scurfield was just as significant in affirming and protecting her role as the power of Caws. While Caws exerted a personal and charismatic power over decision making [23], Mrs. Scurfield occupied a structurally significant position in which theory and practice could be reconciled without disturbing the mainstream work of the club. Mrs. Scurfield's presence provided an umbrella under which both Mrs Winter and indeed, Caws, could operate relatively freely. In the absence of Mrs Scurfield the power of Caws was weakened and the position of Mrs. Winter became unsustainable.

Mrs Scurfield

Mrs. Scurfield was present as a visitor at the formal opening of the club in January 1902 and attended her last meeting in December 1903 prior to moving to Sheffield, when the committee presented her with “six handsomely bound volumes of Rudyard Kipling's Poems as a token of their regret at losing her services” (17th Dec. 1903). Those services had been largely those of a Lady Visitor, investigating the conditions in the homes of club members.

Prior to the club opening, Mrs Scurfield had indicated her willingness to undertake investigative work and afterwards she offered to create a “Ladies’ Committee of Investigation.” Later at a special meeting of “would be helpers” four additional women and one minister, volunteered their services “to investigate cases.” At this meeting (24th Jan. 1902), Mrs. Scurfield offered “to attend the rooms” every other Thursday evening. She also agreed to “form a Ladies Commee. of helpers and to report progress.” She then proceeded to take the names of the boys present in the club that night with a view to visiting their homes. There was no clarification at this stage of what ‘investigation’ implied and the idea seems simply to have been to gather information and evidence which would enable the work to be focused more effectively. No doubt, such information would also have been of some interest in the Scurfield household for as medical officer for health, it was Dr. Scurfield's duty to report to the local authority the sanitary conditions of the houses in this area of the town.[24] Mrs Scurfield's enthusiasm for the work must surely be read in this context.

Apart from the representation of Mrs. Scurfield, there are no surviving records of the activities of other investigators or of the Ladies Committee. Only an occasional glimpse of formally organised work by women can be discerned, eg. “The committee decided that at the next monthly meeting of the Executive a vote of thanks to the Ladies’ committee, and specially to Mrs Scurfield, should be proposed, for their invaluable services to the club” (13th March 1902). Their role in the demise of McLeod suggests that it was mainly through informal channels that the opinions and observations of women were given voice. Their activities, which included helping with “Pleasant Sundays” and

on special occasions, were occasional and irregular. Mrs. Scurfield alone seems to have single-mindedly pursued the responsibilities associated with family visiting and she reported only the results of her own investigations.

It appears that Mrs Scurfield associated herself with the Ladies' Committee primarily as a means of facilitating her personal access, and by extension, that of the Charity Organisation Society, to the affairs of the Lambton Street club and the homes of the boys. It was only because she represented the Ladies' Committee that she was able to attend the management committee meetings. It would have been difficult for her to have gained personal access as a woman to a male venture. Neither could she have done so as a representative of the COS, because the management of Lambton Street was composed entirely of independent individuals. However the moral charitable framework within which the Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club was constituted provided the rationale for the Ladies Committee and for the investigative visits which she proposed.

It was not until April 1902 that Mrs Scurfield attended a Management Committee meeting. Probably she organised and attended Ladies' Committee meetings in the first months. Otherwise, the records indicate that she concentrated upon visiting, reporting the circumstances of particular boys and consulting formally with the COS. In February 1902, the cases of two families, including the McM.s "were discussed and left for further inquiry." Then, one week later:

"A letter from the Charity Organisation Society's Official to Mrs. Scurfield about the McM. family was read. The Secretaries were instructed to write Mrs Scurfield that the committee consider the two

little McM. boys fit subjects for removal to Dr Barnardo's Institution if Mrs Scurfield can obtain the requisite consent of the parents" (20th Feb. 1902).

She did not obtain the requisite consent because the following week, "Mrs Scurfield reported through Mr Kirby as to the case of the McM's. On the motion of Mr Perris seconded by Mr Summerbell it was resolved to notify the School board of the non-attendance at school of the two little McM's." (27th Feb. 1902).

This case was to set the tone for Mrs Scurfield's interventions. Her principle purpose in communicating with the Management Committee was to provide information about the family circumstances of individual boys. Her preferred vehicle of communication was either a written or verbal report delivered by one of the men. She did not presume to intervene otherwise. At the first meeting she attended, "on behalf of the Ladies Committee" the minutes imply that she did not speak at all:

"A letter from Mrs Scurfield gave particulars of the cases of Joseph C. and Thomas McK. and George T.

It was pointed out that Joseph C. had found employment at Mesrs J.L. Thompson & Sons Shipyard.

The case of Thomas McK. was still under consideration - also that of George T.

Subsequently Mrs. Scurfield handed in a supplementary report as to Thomas T. - and the Secretary was instructed to ask Mr Cowan if he could obtain him work at the Co-operative Store" (3rd April 1902).

The following week, Mrs. Scurfield was absent and the minutes simply record “Ladies Commee Report read.” However, in the case of George T. whom she had been investigating, “Pending the Father's consent to the proposed emigration the Case of the Boy George T. is postponed: or until it can otherwise be dealt with” (10th April 1902).

No further mention of George T. suggests that as with the McM. brothers, no permission was granted to enable the Lambton Street Club to effect a plan of rescue. The pattern was to be repeated throughout the whole of Mrs. Scurfield's time with the club. At the next meeting which she attended, in June 1902, it was agreed “that Mrs Scurfield be asked to approach Mr. Coley of the Charity Organisation Society and induce him to ask Mr Wilkinson to try and get Dr. Barnardo to take M. and train him” (12th June 1902) but having visited the home, Mrs Scurfield was obliged to report that “Mrs M. refused to part with her boy or allow Committee to do anything for her boys” (19th June 1902).

Except in exceptional circumstances, like that of the boy William F. who was disabled, the parents of club members were resolutely resistant to any active interference in their affairs. When a rumour circulated that “the boys were all to be sent to Canada”, most of them simply stayed away (13th March 1902). In the continuing case of Thomas K. whose mother Mrs. Scurfield found to be “a most deserving hard working widow with home in excellent order though in a very bad neighbourhood,” it was suggested that the whole family - mother, daughter and son, be moved to Seaham and Mrs. Scurfield ensured that work was available for both children in the bottleworks there. Mrs. K. was given a week to think it over. Again, the outcome is not reported, but the decision to provide Tom K. with a jersey at the end of the following January suggests that the offer “to make a

home in Seaham under better circumstances and surroundings” was declined (4th-18th Dec. 1902; 29th Jan. 1903).

The unwillingness of local families, and especially mothers, to co-operate with the designs upon their lives continuously frustrated the aspiration towards ‘Waifs’ Rescue’ and Mrs. Scurfield’s industrious efforts towards this end were of no avail. However, the authoritative evidence gleaned from her visits balanced the more personal, informal knowledge emanating from Mrs. Winter. Her work was therefore of value in enabling the committee to make evidence-based decisions regarding individual boys. In particular, Mrs. Scurfield’s reports enabled them to put into effect a clothing scheme without fear that they would be accused of indiscriminate support for undeserving families.

Many Lambton Street club members were noticeably ill clad in a period when clothing was a major expense in any budget and a scarce resource for those without surplus. Surviving photographs which show the boys barefoot and ragged are indicative of their poverty. [25] Particularly in the winter, the committee men expressed compassionate concern, but clothing also played a crucial part in their desire to facilitate access to steady and regular work for their members. It was believed that the inconsistency and insecurity of casual labour lay at the root of the problem of poverty. A regular income, preferably derived from skilled labour was the route to order and respectability.[26] But boys who were not dressed respectably could not hope to be offered regular employment.

Providing deserving boys with decent clothing was an implicit but essential plank of the strategy to save them from reproducing the poverty of their parents. By April of the first year, without prior minuted discussion, the managers simply agreed to seek

information from the police in Liverpool and Manchester about the clothing schemes operating in those cities. On receipt of the replies, it was agreed “that these be handed to Mrs. Scurfield for her study and that of the Ladies committee who were to be expressly invited to join the executive Committee at their next meeting” (28th May 1902). There is no record of any Ladies other than Mrs. Scurfield attending the meeting to discuss the scheme, and significantly, at this meeting, as the first item on the agenda, it was unanimously agreed that she be elected as an individual member of the committee.

Voting Mrs. Scurfield onto the committee was an indication of the importance which the men attached to the clothing scheme and its proper administration. It suggested that as a full member of the Committee, she could take primary responsibility in this matter. Her investigative visiting would inform decision making. The men seem to have simply assumed that the practical application of the scheme would be undertaken by the Ladies’ Committee.

However, in reality, the person who was most active in the face to face work with the boys was Mrs. Winter. She alone was in a practical position to fit out the boys and as caretaker, to manage the store of clothes held by the club. Thus it was in relation to the quintessentially feminine arena of clothing children that the work of Mrs Scurfield and Mrs Winter was to overlap. And it was in this arena that the tensions and contradictions inherent in their position were to come to a head.

Clothing

To have allocated clothing simply on the basis of need would have flouted the principles of charitable giving. Moreover, *all* the boys were needy. The Clothing Scheme

allowed for boys to be kitted out for work and for younger boys to be given garments in response to need after a satisfactory report from Mrs. Scurfield. Thus the Committee sought to maintain control over their giving, but this was thwarted by the responses of the boys and their families.

In the first recorded case of clothing being offered,
“The boy Michael P. (No. 74) attended before Committee and engaged to enter the Smithy at Brewers Yard as kindly offered by Mr Cowan at 6 shillings per week. Mrs Scurfield was commissioned to obtain the needful clothing for Michael P's outfit: so that he may commence his new duties next Monday Morning at 9 o'clock” (19th July 1902).

Michael P. left this job in less than a week complaining “that he had been made to wield too heavy a hammer.” He could neither be persuaded to go back to work nor to return the clothing and “Mr Caws was instructed to reprimand him before giving him his ticket for the picnic” planned as a club treat (7th Aug. 1902).

During a period of absence of Mrs. Scurfield, Mrs. Winter under instruction from the committee clothed an unnamed boy for work. Within a week he had taken an alternative job. At least he was still working. Thomas H. on the other hand, “after being fitted out with clothing and working some short while at the Blacksmiths work under Mr Cowan had given up the job and returned to Street Vending” (14th Aug. 1902).

The pattern was to be given a further twist in the case of Tom C. whose family

already owed the Committee three shillings. This had been given to them by Caws via Mrs Winter “as an inducement to allow their son to return to his work”:

“Mr Caws reported that C. had been fitted out with one suit of clothes by Mrs Winter and he, (Mr Caws) believed, but was not sure, also with another suit of clothes by Messrs Candlish.

The Committee after hearing Mr Caws explanation decided to allow the cost of clothes supplied by Mrs Winter” (6th Nov. 1902).

In this case, Mrs Winter and Caws had clearly exceeded the authority granted them by the committee. Sensing criticism, Caws explained that the formal clothing scheme had not yet been put into operation. In response, “He was instructed to get the printed forms forthwith completed, and on the motion of Mr Kirby seconded by Mr Cockshott it was resolved that the Clothing Scheme rules be henceforth adhered to” (6th Nov. 1902). Meanwhile the committee would attempt to recover the clothing as well as the three shillings. What followed is recorded the following week:

“Mr Charlton who was unable to attend reported per Mr Caws, the result of his call on Mrs C, who had returned 1 shilling of the 3 shillings as a first installment. Mrs Winter stated that Mrs Coggins had demanded the return of T's shirt failing which she would stop off 1 shilling from the two shillings balance yet unreturned. Mrs Winter stated that the old shirt was a rag and had disappeared, she having fitted the boy out with a new shirt instead. Mr Charlton reported that the boy's father seemed a reasonable man, but the mother unreasonable” (13th Nov. 1902).

The patience of the Committee started to pall. When later in the meeting, the needs of another boy for clothing in relation to work was raised: “the committee accordingly instructed Mr Caws to get Mrs Winter to supply the boy with a decent outfit, and obtain proper written acknowledgement from his mother, the clothing in this case to be stamped by the police.”

These difficulties were experienced in Mrs. Scurfield’s absence. When she next attended a meeting, (4th Dec. 1902) she and the Ladies' Committee, in co-operation with the Chairman, were expressly given the power to deal with clothes. With Mrs. Scurfield fronting it, the clothing scheme ran smoothly. Throughout that winter, Mrs. Scurfield visited homes and made recommendations which were never questioned. Her reports enabled clothing to be provided fairly generally to boys in need. Once the committee had formally agreed to the provision of specific garments, Mrs. Scurfield seems to have been left to implement the decisions. The unspoken assumption was that this would be effected by the Ladies’ committee, but in practice Mrs. Winter undertook this task.

As it became known that clothes might be obtained from the club, boys and their parents began to actively apply for help. The first application came via Mrs. Winter, “The committee having through Mrs Winter heard the application of Mrs R. for boots for James R. decided to grant the application, on the usual terms” (19th Feb. 1903).

With the next application they were less generous and instead of offering clothes, sent Mrs Scurfield to visit the home of the boys concerned. When she reported upon “the miserable condition of things there” (23rd April 1903), one of the committee members

offered to find labouring work for the men of the family. No clothes were provided. This decision marked a tightening of control in relation to those who should be so bold as to ask for clothing, especially when the request had come made through Mrs. Winter.

Despite the diligence of the managers and the best efforts of Mrs Scurfield, the boys and their families continuously flouted the system. Firstly, despite being clothed decently for work, boys remained inconstant in relation to employment.[27] They left their jobs and kept the clothes. Secondly, some boys joined the club, and left as soon as they had procured clothing. Thirdly, some items of clothing disappeared, probably pawned, once they had been allocated. Irregularities in the system were becoming so common that by May 1903, Mrs. Winter was requested “to inspect every Thursday night the boys who have received clothing from the Club and to report on same to committee if and as necessary.” But there were few sanctions that could be imposed other than that of disallowing membership or participation in special events, and they did not wish to lose members.

The inability to enforce the terms of the clothing scheme was frustrating, but while Mrs. Scurfield was involved, management committee members were secure in the knowledge that they were operating a system which was at least designed to limit abuse and which could be publicly defended. However, in October 1903, just as the needy period of winter was approaching, Mrs. Scurfield indicated that she was leaving Sunderland. By this time, Mrs. Winter was much more involved in the practical administration of the scheme, and as Mrs. Scurfield withdrew, Mrs. Winter began representing to the Committee the needs of the boys:

“Mrs Winter reported that (216) George W. was an applicant for clothing. She advised that he be supplied with 1 pair of trousers, 1 jacket and vest, 1 pair shoes, some of the articles she has in stock being suitable. The boy was called upon before committee and appeared not so ill clad after all. But Mrs Winter explained that he was in borrowed clothes. The committee instructed the Hon. Sec. to apply through Mrs Scurfield for information from the Charity Organisation Society as to this boy's case” (1st Oct. 1903).

Mrs. Winter's recommendation was not taken at face value, but when the COS report demonstrated the accuracy of her recommendation, some members of the committee considered that she might be given more responsibility:

“On the motion of Mr Cockshott seconded by Mr Caws it was agreed that the clothes now in possession of the institution should be distributed to the most suitable cases upon the recommendation of Mrs Winter [*inserted later*: -subject to the approval of the Committee]. Mrs Winter was called in and requested to report next week as to the best disposition of the clothing and was informed that boys in regular work might offer nominal sums by way of purchase if they thought fit but [*inserted later*:-parents of] boys who could pay nothing should sign the usual form of receipt. The question of whether boys who pay should sign that form stands over for further consideration” (5th Nov. 1903).

Had this motion stood, Mrs. Winter would have gained a degree of authority, enabling the

club to respond directly to boys' needs. But two weeks later the minute was rescinded and the decision taken to investigate cases recommended by Mrs. Winter in the 'regular' manner. Moreover, Mrs Winter seems to have exceeded her authority, for the minutes later record:

“The Hon. Sec. Reported that he had sent Mrs Scurfield the list of boys recommended by Mrs Winter for gifts of clothing, in order that she might make the visits or inquiries needed to satisfy the committee.

With reference to the case of Mrs Winter full discussion having taken place it was unanimously left to the Chairman to impress upon Mrs Winter the conditions under which her position in the Institution would be continued.

The committee unanimously begged the Chairman to make strong appeal to his [new] wife to take charge of the Ladies' Committee in place of Mrs Scurfield, resigned” (26th Nov. 1903).

Already, Mrs Scurfield's withdrawal was revealing the extent to which she had delegated practical decision making around clothing to Mrs. Winter. This ran against the intentions of the Committee that it should be the middle class Ladies' Committee who carried this responsibility. A system which was apparently working smoothly in practice became problematic as soon as the effort was made to formalise it in a manner which would have accorded a degree of decision making power to a working class woman. Some members of the committee became alarmed at the implication that they were not fully in control.

Matters came to a head during the first two weeks in December when Caws became involved in a full scale row with other Committee members because he had agreed the allocation of clothing on the basis of reports from Mrs. Scurfield which had not been submitted for formal approval. Caws protested that the committee had never previously disapproved any of Mrs. Scurfield's recommendations and that the delay was frustrating when the boys were so clearly in need during the cold weather. But Mrs. Scurfield's resignation had exposed weaknesses in the formal system. She had been voted onto the management committee as the main link to the Ladies' Committee, not as the route to Mrs. Winter. Unfortunately, the Ladies' Committee was more idea than reality - Mrs. Scurfield *was* the Ladies' Committee so far as the Clothing Scheme was concerned. In her absence the myth could no longer be sustained .

In order to help resolve the conflict, one Committee member suggested that until the Ladies' Committee could be reconstituted, he would take responsibility for liaising with the COS, asking them to undertake investigative visiting on behalf of the club. This proposal was accepted and thus the principle reason for including a female member on the Management Committee was removed. Subsequently, when the attempt failed to replace Mrs Scurfield with the new wife of the Chairman a small amount of effort was put into reforming the Ladies' Committee, but without success. No suggestion was made to re-appoint a female investigator onto the management committee.

In the months following Mrs. Scurfield's departure, the club continued to distribute clothing but mainly on the recommendation of individual members of the management committee. Meanwhile there was a shift towards asking the boys to pay for

items: “on the motion of Capt. Hall seconded by Capt. Forster the committee agreed to let W. (216) have a pair of boots for 6 pence (25th Feb. 1904)” and “Capt. Hall proposed and Capt. Forster seconded and it was agreed to allow (5) Tom K. An outfit for 3/6 to be paid in advance” (3rd March 1904). In May, Mrs. Winter “paid in 7/- cash for clothes supplied.” Meanwhile Thompson, (the Chairman), and Caws “distributed 3 doz. Pairs of stockings to the best attendees needing them” (25th Feb. 1904). It was not until May 1904 that the COS was asked to investigate a case, and as a result of the subsequent report, those concerned were refused clothing. At this stage, Mrs. Winter appears to have been completely removed from decisions about clothing. Indeed her role in relation to the boys seems to have diminished considerably. Apart from collecting money, she is mentioned in relation to “colouring walls” which the boys had “defaced,” but this was a task directly associated with caretaking. In the AGM of March that year, there is no appreciation of her services, and in April, the question of a permanent “male attendant” was again raised. This time, “Mr. Charlton elaborated a scheme” which was put to a sub-committee to discuss in detail (21st April 1904).

Mrs Winter Replaced

During the three months between the proposal to appoint a male attendant and the report of the sub-committee the minutes suggest unease amongst the principle actors. Caws, always an eminently practical operator and probably always aware of the everyday realities of club relations, was the only member of the Committee to speak against the proposal and refused to sit on the subcommittee. He then went on holiday. While he was away, Mrs. Winter took to her bed with rheumatic pains. On recovery, she requested a holiday on Whit Monday. This was agreed and for the first time, the Club was closed on

that day. Most significantly, at the beginning of June, “Disorderly conduct was reported by Capt. Forster on the previous Monday. Mr. Smith reported bad conduct the previous Sunday when he was in attendance and had to put the boys out” (2nd June 1904).

Seven boys were expelled and only Caws and one other voted against this decision. Smith’s voice is increasingly apparent in the minutes. By now he was not only working regularly in the club, making suggestions for the development of activities, helping with events and making use of his joinery skills in the building, but he had also become a member of the management committee. Meanwhile in the listing of helpers, Mrs. Winter’s name is completely absent (16th June 1904).

When the subcommittee reported at the end of July 1904, they “Advised the appointment of Mr. J.A. Smith as Resident Superintendent in lieu of Mrs. Winter, and at the same remuneration which Mrs Winter receives” (28th July 1904). At the special meeting convened to discuss this advice, it was agreed that Smith should take up residence 1st October following with the following job description:

- “-To take charge of the shelter, keep it clean and in order, and maintain discipline among the lads during club hours;
- To report to Cttee in detail all cases requiring help;
- To take charge of the clothing scheme” (4th August 1904).

Caws was the only member of the Committee to vote against, contending that “Mrs. Winter’s services were too valuable to be dispensed with.”

Having agreed that they would help Mrs Winter find employment, the Committee

secured rooms nearby which they paid Smith to fit out as a shop. They also took a collection in order to give her a sum of money with which to start her new life. This clearly did not compensate her for the loss of her home and job. Later, she was to apply to the committee for references to enable her to take cleaning jobs. Early the following year, Smith complained to the Committee that she had been publicly accusing him of taking her job and it was agreed that she should be barred from the club's premises. Thus her role in the life of the Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' club formally ended.

Conclusion

When Mrs. Winter was replaced by Jim Smith, he came to live in the premises of Lambton Street. Occasional reference in the minutes implies that his wife (whose name is not given) worked informally alongside him, particularly adopting those duties, such as providing refreshments for the boys, which were associated with the maternal role.

Henceforward, the tone of the work was to change. Smith, a joiner by trade and therefore as a respectable, skilled working class man, a significant role model for the boys, focused his energies upon club programming and activities. Finding employment for members when they left school, helping particular boys in moments of need and visiting families remained part of his working brief but this became supplementary. The COS remained involved for a short while, but a number of cases investigated with negative outcomes for the boys, and in one particular case the subsequent refusal of a father to allow his boys to attend the club, meant that its role gradually receded. When Mr. Coley of the COS died in 1905, shortly before Frank Caws, the Lambton Street club quietly

dropped the association. When Smith undertook home visits, he did not do so in order to provide detailed reports on 'cases' but as a fellow worker. He offered the Management committee only general impressions. Yet his recommendations regarding individual boys were generally trusted.

Thus a transition was effected which consolidated the agency as a public facility, a recreational club offering a collective benefit for local boys. Although individual boys were helped, all attempts at rescue ceased and investigative case work disappeared. In the process the Committee was relieved of many of its anxieties and tensions. Significantly, at this point, efforts to develop the Ladies' Committee changed direction. In the immediate future supportive women were asked simply to organise occasional bazaars and social events for the purposes of fundraising. In this way, women were removed from all direct decision-making influence.

Smith and his wife enabled the Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' club to reconcile a number of competing perspectives around class and gender relations without the necessity of accommodating female power. Whereas in the initial stages of the club's life reconciliation had been achieved by the practically combined but separately conceived efforts of Mrs. Scurfield and Mrs. Winter, aided by Frank Caws, the collapse of that approach, precipitated by the departure of Mrs. Scurfield had revealed a deep unease about working class and female power and decision making. Mrs. Winter was initially useful as a means of mediating relations with boys and their families, but her role could only be conceptualised within a maternalism which continuously reinforced her inferior and ultimately oppositional class and gender status. Ultimately, her position depended

upon the willingness of the men to trust a woman of their own class. Mrs Scurfield's approach helped sustaining the liberal discourse of rescue in which Mrs Winter's activities were inscribed, but it played to the promotional narrative rather than reflecting the real relations of the club. When the real relations were exposed, the appointment of Smith, as a waged and therefore subject employee, represented a shift towards an acceptance of the necessity of a working class presence in the day to day life in the club but in that shift, the maintenance of masculine authority was paramount.

When Frank Caws died in April 1905, the process of transition from a rescue agency to a boys' club was completed in all but name. It was as a Boys' Club, with Smith and his wife in residence for the next fifty years that Lambton Street was to become a major centre of activities-based youth work for boys serving the whole of Sunderland. Its activities eventually became a by-word for respectability and opportunity for working class boys in the town but even after the admission of girls to membership in the 1970s, women never again occupied a central role in its work. Meanwhile, the contributions of Mrs Winter and Mrs Scurfield were quietly forgotten.

Notes and References

- [1] Dates in the text refer to the Minutes Books of the Lambton Street Management Committee.
- [2] David Bell (Ed.) (u.d), *The Sunderland Year Book 1902: A Local History and Guide*, (reproduced Sunderland: Wear Books)
- [3] GillianWagner, (1979) *Barnardo*, (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson)
- [4] J. A. Smith (1952) *Fifty Years at Lambton Street*, (Sunderland: Summerbell Printers)
- [5] The Barnardo tale recalls the popular sentimental image of the waif in Victorian Literature. See Anna Davin, (2001) 'Waif Stories in Late Nineteenth-Century England' in *History Workshop Journal*, 52, Autumn, pp.67-98

- [6] To respect confidentiality, only the first letters of the boys' surnames are used.
- [7] Anthony M. Platt (1969) *The Child Savers: The invention of delinquency*, (University of Chicago)
- [8] Sunderland Herald and Daily Post, (SHDP) 3rd Jan.1902.
- [9] SHDP, 3rd Jan.1902
- [10] The first meeting of the Sunderland branch of the NSPCC took place in 1888 (SDE 19th Oct.1888).
- [11] Robert Humphreys (1995) *Sin, Organised Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England*, (London: Macmillan)
- [12] Son of the shipbuilder J.L. Thompson
- [13] SHDP 3rd Jan. 1902
- [14] E. Moberly Bell (1942) *Octavia Hill: A biography*, (London: Constable and Co. Ltd);
- [15] Charles B. Russell and Lillian M. Rigby (1908) *Working Lads' Clubs*, (London :Macmillan).
- [16] Seth Koven,(1997) 'Dr. Barnardo's "Artistic Fictions": Photography, Sexuality and the Ragged Child in Victorian London' in *Radical History Review*, 69, pp.6-45
- [17] Sunderland Daily Echo (SDE) 19th April, 1934.
- [18] SHDP 30th March, 1904
- [19] Russell and Rigby, *Working Lads Clubs*.
See also:
 W. McG. Eager, (1953) *Making men: Being a History of Boys' Clubs and Related Movements in Great Britain*, (University of London Press).
- [20] William F. died in Felixtowe in 1907. His Barnardo files are only accessible to relatives.
- [21] Owner of the Wallsend shipyard, later Swan-Hunter.
- [22] Minutes of Annual Meeting, 14th Feb. 1903
- [23] Jean Spence (2003) Frank Caws and the Development of Work With Boys in Sunderland, in Ruth Gilchrist, Tony Jeffs and Jean Spence (Eds.) *Architects of Change:Studies in the History of Community and Youth Work*, (Leicester: The National Youth Agency)
- [24] David Bell (Ed) *The Sunderland Year Book 1902*.
- [25] Photograph of Thomas A. reproduced in Album created after the death of Caws. In the possession of Mrs, Elaine Amundsen, granddaughter. See also, photograph of group in The Illustrated Chronicle, Thursday July 20th 1911.
- [26] E. J.Urwick (Ed.) (1904), *Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities*, (London: J.M. Dent and Co.)
- [27] Jean Spence (2001) Edwardian Boys and Labour in the East End of Sunderland: Welfare and Work, in Ruth Gilchrist, Tony Jeffs, Jean Spence (Eds), *Essays in the History of Community and*

Youth Work, (Leicester :Youth Work Press)